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### Butterflies in the Woolwich (S.E. London) district, 1990.

For several years now I have tended to feel, at the end of each season, that it has been even worse for butterflies in my district than the one preceding; with, doubtless, an occasional bright spot here and there to relieve the prevailing gloom (rendered still more profound by contrast with frequent glowing reports from other parts of the country). The present season has in some respects continued this downward trend; despite the long-lasting fine hot weather from spring to autumn, which one might have hoped would bring about an abundance of almost all the species that could have been expected in the old days. On the contrary, we have had here a surprisingly poor showing of *C. argiolus* (Holly Blue) — hardly more than sporadic throughout — and a total absence of all the autumn Vanessids hard to account for. The autumn brood of *P. aegeria* (Speckled Wood) failed to materialise, possibly a direct result of the drought — here long and severe. Nor was the promise of increase offered in 1989 by two sightings (one doubtful) of *L. megera* (Wall) realised in 1990, none being seen.

So much for the gloom — now for the bright spots. In strange contrast to *argiolus*, *P. icarus* (Common Blue), which has hardly lived up to its

popular epithet in recent years, had an excellent season in both broods on Woolwich Common, bravely resisting the combined onslaughts of drought and the local authority's mowing programme. I was agreeably surprised at this welcome revival after the very low numbers of late, due I suppose to the *Lotus* having staged a spectacular come-back on the common this year. The same and related plants were the principal focus for record numbers of *T. lineola* (Essex Skipper); previously erratic and highly localised in small populations, this year it was the most abundant butterfly on the common in its season, eclipsing even *M. jurtina* (Meadow Brown). For the first time here I was able to detect the presence of its very close ally, *T. sylvestris* (Small Skipper), in one particular spot, favouring the same flowers and flying with *lineola*, but in far smaller numbers. *O. venata* (Large Skipper) had a very fair season. *C. pamphilus* (Small Heath), plentiful at times on the common in years past, was fitful and uncertain in appearance; I have never seen it on other tracts of grassland in the area, such as Blackheath. *A. urticae* (Small Tortoiseshell) was not uncommon about a nettlebed, but nowhere else. In the same locality the first-ever *A. cardamines* (Orange-tip) was a most welcome and cheering sight. I have never understood why this attractive species should be absent hereabouts; now, hopefully, it may be attempting at last to establish itself, especially as it turned up elsewhere in the area.

This second spot was on the east (Welling) side of Shooters Hill, where on 17th May I noted two males at a place where I had thought it should occur because of the presence of a foodplant (*Alliaria*). One of them was being chased by a "white" (*Pieris* sp.). Though no more *cardamines* were seen, a later visit (21.vii) was not disappointing. In a small overgrown area where a path led through a rough thicket I counted eight species of butterfly, giving altogether, if one adds two more seen close by there at other times and certainly breeding there, ten species — a very respectable total for any one small spot in this district. I need mention only the most notable: *P.c-album* (Comma) occupied the very same perch on two separate visits, and was in good numbers along and near the nettle-fringed bank of a dried-up watercourse; *P. aegeria* was quite plentiful in the shadier parts about willow foliage on the 24th, and the first and only specimen of *P. tithonus* (Gatekeeper) I have yet seen in the district was spotted at rest rather low down, on the 21st. Search for more on the next visit was unsuccessful, but one wonders whether this species too is beginning to colonise the area. Incidentally it must be rather rare to see *tithonus* as a solitary specimen only; conversely, a species numerous at the spot, *P. napi* (Green-veined White), is far more often encountered by odd specimens — even though common generally.

Finally: I had to be content with but a single sighting of *L. phlaeas* (Small Copper) both this year (Charlton Park) and last (Blackheath).—  
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